

Yorkley Court Community Farm Planning Application

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Supporting Statements

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Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Project Outline

This project proposes to develop a sustainable community to continue to facilitate the establishment of an educational and research farm inspired by the principles of food sovereignty, permaculture and agroecology. Central to the project is a belief that genuine sustainability requires a radical shift in every aspect of our lives, from housing and livelihood creation to the production of food and energy.

The project will create a number of social benefits for the community of the Forest of Dean, including:

- Sustainable food and fuel production: the working farm aims to demonstrate that small-scale agriculture can be economically viable and ecologically regenerative.
- Healthier communities, integrated within the landscape: the project is open to local residents to become involved, encouraging time outdoors, growing, cooking and eating nutritious food. The project aims to make organic and local produce available free or at low-cost to those involved, and affordably to the wider Forest of Dean community. Collaborating on projects provides social interaction and offers a sense of well being.
- Skills and education: volunteering, courses, workshops and apprenticeships in a working farm setting will focus on personal resilience and making participants more employable in the changing economic climate.
- Rural enterprise incubator: shared access to resources such as land, tools and machinery, workshops, processing equipment, distribution networks, educational spaces and expertise offers valuable support to individuals and groups in creating businesses and self-employment in food, fuel and fibre production.

The group living on the farm operate through a registered co-operative consortium and collaborate to organise a wide range of projects.

We are seeking 5 years temporary planning permission for 15 temporary structures constituting a low-impact settlement associated with a mixture of agricultural, forestry, and other rural-based enterprises.

1.2 History

Historic use of the site

Parts of the site were previously used as an open cast mine, which was covered over and is now returning to pasture and regenerative woodland.

The Nissen huts and hard standing in the lower section have previously been used for repairing large plant machinery used by the armed forces.

Recent use

Since the project's inception two years ago the Yorkley Court Community Farm team have improved the site through extensive waste removal and the development of off-grid infrastructure. Potentially hazardous and contaminated containers of oil and chemicals were present and have since been disposed of at registered chemical disposal sites after consultation on safe removal and transport. A large volume of broken glass, rubble, rubbish and other waste from around the area has also been removed. Repairs have been carried out on derelict buildings and a distributed solar PV system has been installed to provide power for lighting, communications and water pumping and treatment.

A diverse range of land based work is underway to provide food, to create livelihoods and to regenerate the landscape.

- Orchard pruning has begun the restoration of two local abandoned orchards.
- A woodland management plan has been produced and is being implemented
- A number of food growing sites have been cleared and cultivated by hand, producing vegetables, fruit and herbs.
- Plant nurseries have been established, producing seedlings and plants to supply the growing projects on the farm, and the wider community .
- Livestock include pigs, chickens and dairy goats.
- Three working horses are currently being trained, and will help with the extraction of wood for the woodland, and cultivating land.
- A food distribution project has been implemented to provide additional outlets for producers across the Forest of Dean district, as well as members of the Yorkley Court Sustainable Farmers co-operative.

These activities have been integrating the farm project into the wider Forest of Dean community, and provided skill shares, training and access to outdoor recreation.

1.3 Ethos

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states: “At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.”

In order to talk about sustainability we need to address the context in which the question of sustainability exists. Primarily the focus of Yorkley Court Community Farm is the sustainability of our food and farming systems.

Sustainable Agriculture

We believe in the need to switch to sustainable agriculture based on agroecology, which is defined as:

- The application of ecology to the design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems.
- A whole-systems approach to agriculture and food systems development based on traditional knowledge, alternative agriculture, and local food system experiences.
- Linking ecology, culture, economics, and society to sustain agricultural production, healthy environments, and viable food and farming communities.

A report from the UN Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Climate Change (A/HRC/16/49, December 2010) supports the adoption of an agroecological approach to farming.

“Conventional farming relies on expensive inputs, fuels climate change and is not resilient to climatic shocks. It simply is not the best choice any more today... A large segment of the scientific community now acknowledges the positive impacts of agroecology on food production, poverty alleviation and climate change mitigation - and this is what is needed in a world of limited resources.”

The report references studies showing that farms in the developing world, crippled by increasing costs of chemical and mechanical inputs and decreasing soil fertility, caused by industrial farming methods, “demonstrated a doubling of crop yields over a period of 3-10 years” when switching to agroecological methods.

For more information on Agroecology please see the discussion paper ***Mainstreaming Agroecology: Implications for Global Food and Farming Systems*** produced by The Centre for Agroecology and Food Security at Coventry University

<http://s.coop/mainstreamingagroeco>

The NPPF states :

“International and national bodies have set out broad principles of sustainable development. Resolution 42/187 of the United Nations General Assembly defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future* set out five ‘guiding principles’ of sustainable development: living within the planet’s environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using sound science responsibly.”

The Yorkley Court Community Farm project is focused on substantially increasing all aspects of the sustainability of food production and is in agreement with the UK Sustainable Development Strategy’s guiding principles.

For an in depth analysis of the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the project please see Sections 3.1 - 3.3 of this document.

Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty asserts the right of people to define their own food systems. It puts the individuals who produce, distribute and consume food at the center of decisions on food systems and policies. Food sovereignty provides a framework for communities to work together and create dynamic and resilient local food and farming systems.

In the Forest of Dean, as in the rest of the UK, local food is an expensive and niche product. This is the result of DEFRA policy supporting farmers to add value to primary produce creating boutique, deli products rather than staple foods. To the majority of Forest of Dean residents the food produced in the Forest is an unaffordable luxury, forcing residents instead to buy cheap imported food from large supermarkets. In the context of Food Sovereignty this is a tragedy..

We identify with small scale agrarian communities around the world and act with them to uphold the traditions, knowledge, skills and practices that support subsistence based economies. Our understanding of a right to a home is founded upon our shared desire to support our communities through our relationship with the land.

The first session of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas took place in Geneva on 15 July. See Appendix Z

Permaculture Land Management

In order to be sustainable there is a need to live and work on the land, to promote sustainable local fuel and food production and minimise environmental impacts. This style of holistic living is often referred to as “permaculture”.

In a recent application for the Landmatters Permaculture Project (APP/K1128/A/06/2018778, 10th June 2010) the inspector accepted the definition of permaculture as:

“the conscious design and maintenance of agriculturally productive eco-systems which have the diversity, stability and resilience of natural eco-systems... the harmonious

integration of landscape and people, providing their food, energy, shelter and other material and non-material needs in a sustainable way.”

A number of places around the country are both teaching and practising permaculture (see *Relevant Planning Precedents*, Appendix A).

1.4 Aims and Objectives

Genuinely Sustainable Land Use

Land use will be guided by the principles of permaculture and agroecology. This goes far beyond organic standards, striving to better align agricultural systems with natural systems. This includes ensuring full incorporation of woodland, hedgerow systems, livestock systems, vegetable production, orchard systems, pastures and arables in rotations that support regeneration, wildlife habitats, biodiversity and topsoil development. Such systems maintain and restore landscape health, making farmland more productive, biodiverse and resistant to damage from extreme weather events.

Develop and Support Local Food and Resource Systems

The project aims to demonstrate that within agroecological systems food, fuel and materials production can be abundant. The project will accommodate a wide variety of land based enterprises that will provide food for the project and local markets. The project aims to make it easy for members of the wider community to gain livelihood through land-based enterprise by providing facilities to accommodate people interested in traditional crafts, food processing, sustainable energy production and sustainable transport.

Engaging the Local Community

Central to the farm project is the Forest of Dean community. The project aims to involve and engage the wider community as far as possible, in land-based activities and learning, in celebrations and traditional crafts. The project is already linked with local groups and organisations such as Transition FOD and FOD Seed Savers, and we aim to strengthen links between networks in the Forest.

The project aspires to be a place to promote community well-being, where Forest of Dean residents can engage, relax and connect. Access to open spaces in which to practice organic gardening have been shown to have significant positive impacts on both physical and mental health.

In the UK National Ecosystem Assessment technical report (2011) it is stated:
“observing nature and participating in physical activity in green spaces play an important

role in positively influencing human health and wellbeing”

For further details see Appedix AA: Growing Health.

Provide educational activities and skill-shares

The project aspires to be an educational hub for the local community for sharing skills around food and sustainable living. The range of skills practised in land-based activities and traditional crafts lend themselves to workshop and educational settings. To make these workshops and educational opportunities accessible, alternative models of exchange are being explored so as not to exclude anyone on low income. Further to on-site courses the project aims to document practices and methodologies to create valuable reference material for other projects and farmers across the country and the world.

Section 2 – Project Details

2.1 Sustainable Settlement

The site is a 30 acre strip of land on Yorkley Lane, including 15 acres of woodland.

Low Impact Dwellings

We have been inspired by the Tinker's Bubble application (APP/C/94/R3325/635596- 635607, 17th August 1995), where temporary permission was granted for a number of low impact dwellings sited in a woodland area supporting a sustainable community engaged in agriculture and forestry on a 40 acre site.

The Tinker's Bubble community was established almost 20 years ago and is seen as an asset to the local area, with 20 permanent residents pursuing sustainable agricultural and forestry livelihoods.

See Appendix A, *Relevant Planning Precedents*.

Our proposal is for 15 small, low-impact temporary structures to accommodate up to 15 permanent residents. These yurts and geodomes will function as bedroom spaces. The structures will collectively constitute a single dwelling unit based around shared use of the

central kitchen and toilet, with the separate dwelling spaces effectively acting as annexed bedrooms.

The yurts and geodomes will be constructed from canvas and locally sourced wood. They will be sited on portable wooden platforms. A description and some examples of low-impact dwellings can be found in *Low Impact Dwellings*, Appendix H.

Communal Kitchen and Bathroom Facilities

We are currently using an existing building on site as a kitchen and office space. The building is a small Nissen hut, originally believed to be a barracks. Chimney holes indicate possible historic use as a kitchen/rest area. We have installed a new wood burner and flue. Our solar powered water storage and filtration system is housed in this building as well, with solar panels placed on the roof.

Incorporating the current kitchen/rest area space into the dwelling unit as proposed would constitute change of use of the building to residential.

Toilet facilities on site are provided by composting toilets based on the “Tree Bog” design. Details of our compost toilet system can be found in our *Waste Minimisation* document (Appendix P)

Water Supply

Water on site is provided by a number of springs. We have installed a pumping system powered by a small solar panel to bring water up to the kitchen and a water filtration system which includes both carbon filter and UV treatment chamber to kill bacteria.

We have consulted the environment agency and do not need an extraction licence for the small amount of water we are using on site.

More details on our water systems can be found in our *Water* document (Appendix M).

2.2 Renewable Energy

“Planning should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate.. and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy)”

-NPPF, Core Planning Policies

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:

“The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years. Carbon dioxide concentrations have increased by 40% since pre-industrial times, primarily from fossil fuel emissions and secondarily from net land use change emissions. The ocean has absorbed about 30% of the emitted anthropogenic carbon dioxide, causing ocean acidification” (IPCC, 2013)

The IPCC indicate a grave situation caused primarily through cultural use of fossil fuels for the supply of energy for heating, electricity and transport. We strive to meet our electrical and heating needs through reducing our demand on fossil fuels and using renewable sources.

Further to this, we endeavor to share the knowledge and skills we are acquiring as widely as possible, to help others in the wider community to gain confidence in setting up renewable energy infrastructure for example our public Rocket Stove and Solar Panel making workshops (see Appendix K: Previous events and workshops.)

Electricity

Electricity is generated via solar panels, with some small scale wind generation planned for the future. Currently, small solar systems exist to:

- Pump water from the spring to the kitchen
- Power the office with lighting and computer and phone chargers
- Power the workshop for recharging power tools.
- LED lighting and UV water filtration in the kitchen
- In individuals bedroom spaces for personal lighting and charging

Solar installations are all generally small, ranging from 40W to 220W. Many of our panels are recycled and some are home made from recycled materials.

Battery banks are all sourced second-hand. Batteries have a major environmental impact so identifying battery waste streams aids in minimising the environmental impact of renewable energy.

Key to meeting the electricity demands of the community is reducing demand to well below the UK individual and household averages. This is achieved by:

- Minimising need through efficient electrical devices (e.g. LED lighting)
- Utilising more efficient means where conversion to heat (e.g. a kettle) or mechanical (e.g. washing machines) is required.

For more information on our electrical power infrastructure see Appendix N.

Heating and Cooking

Fuel for space heating and cooking is sourced on site from the woodland. Wood is extracted from areas managed as coppice as detailed in the site Woodland Management Plan (Appendix L).

Burning wood as a fuel can be a zero carbon emission process if done correctly. Firstly, wood is coppiced using primarily hand tools and human labour. As the trees grow back, they absorb the carbon dioxide that was emitted during the burning of the harvested wood.

Carbon emissions are also negated by the use of highly efficient biochar producing stoves. Biochar is produced during the process of gasification which can then be put back into the soil, improving soil structure as well as sequestering carbon.

More information on rocket stoves and biochar production can be found in Appendix N.

2.3 Waste Management

About 177 million tonnes of waste are generated every year in England alone. This is a poor use of resources and causes ongoing environmental damage - for example, waste sent to landfill produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

We want to move towards a 'zero waste economy'. This doesn't mean that no waste exists - it refers to an economy in which resources are used appropriately and fully valued, financially and environmentally. It means we reduce, reuse and recycle all we can, and throw things away only as a last resort.

Reduce: We are always looking for ways of creating less waste and as we begin to grow more of our own food and are able to produce more of our material needs from the land our material waste will decline. Most of the non recyclables YCCF generates at the moment are from food packaging so by growing more of our food on site the levels of packaging will be reduced.

Reuse: We avoid throwing away anything that has another use. Also in most cases the materials we have used to build with are salvaged waste products from timber yards, saw mills and other industrial outlets. We also repair broken tools and equipment using the on site forge and woodworking workshop. We reuse organic matter which is composted and used as fertiliser in food production.

Recycle: We currently take glass, cardboard, paper, tetra packs, plastic bottles and cans to recycling points nearby.

Non Recyclable Waste

Non recyclable waste is disposed of in the local council Household Waste facility.

Full details of our waste management can be found in our *Waste Minimisation Statement* (Appendix P).

2.4 Working With The Local Food System

One of the key components in sustainable food production is connecting local producers with local consumers. Distribution is a critical issue for many small-scale producers across the Forest.

A solution has been implemented by residents of the farm to address this problem: Dean Forest Food Hub allows local producers to add their products to a wide range of locally made food, drink and craft products. The Food Hub distributes local organic food boxes weekly across the Forest.

The model is flexible for producers, helping small and micro producers with access to free marketing and options for low retail mark-ups. For more established producers the Hub operates just as any other retail outlet.

More details can be found at www.deanforestfoodhub.org.uk

2.5 Local food, fuel and materials production

The development of a working farm forms the basis for many of the goals of the project. Following the principles of agroecological land use we aim to generate a surplus of food, fuels and materials to trade with the wider community.

Farm Enterprises

We have begun to establish a number of rural enterprises on the farm based around sustainable food, fuel and material production. Some examples are:

- Vegetable and herb gardens
- sustainable wood harvesting
- woodland crafts
- dairy goats
- a fruit tree nursery
- egg production
- working horses

Projects have been selected to provide for the needs of the community and to be integrative in the project as a whole. Members of the co-operative and temporary volunteers collaborate to manage the projects. We aim to use working horses for both cultivation and wood extraction in forestry, and hope to offer demonstration days and workshops in the future based around these activities.

Further details of enterprise proposals can be found in Appendix B.

Land Management

Land management is intended to integrate these projects and enterprises into a holistic plan for the whole farm, with consideration for the maintenance, enhancement and expansion of habitats, hedgerow systems and wild spaces where possible.

Full details of the Land Management Plan can be found in Appendix C.

Selling Produce

Any produce from the farm can be sold through Dean Forest Food Hub, which has an established and growing customer base already.

This season we began selling seedlings and plants grown on the farm, through Dean Forest Food Hub and other local outlets. We also began to sell some surplus food, eggs and vegetables, hand delivered to Yorkley residents.

The skill sets of volunteers, or entrepreneurs developing projects on the farm, finance and conditions on the land and in the local economy will create opportunities for the sustainable development of different projects and enterprises on the farm.

2.6 Building Resilient Communities

Yorkley Court Community Farm is guided by the belief that food production needs to be truly embedded in the local community. There is a large emphasis on the collaborative development of the whole farm enterprise and between individual projects within the farm.

This collaborative development does not only involve the residents of the farm or the various volunteers who visit, but also numerous people resident in the Forest of Dean. It is a core principle of YCCF that people from the surrounding area should be encouraged to become involved in both the management of the farm and the creation and development of projects based at the farm.

There is an open framework for the creation of farm projects and many opportunities for people with, or without previous experience to become involved in the development of existing projects.

This kind of collaborative development can be extremely empowering enabling individuals to learn many new skills that they can use either within the frame work of YCCF based enterprises or to take away and use for enterprises external to the farm.

Central to the ethos of the YCCF co-operative is the building and strengthening of links with the local community, to encourage wider involvement in the project and to play a part in enhancing community resilience and sustainability in the Forest of Dean.

Over the last two year we have engaged in a number of projects, including:

- The hosting of educational workshops and public events (see Appendix K).
- Collaborating with a local firewood buyers co-operative, who are currently using the site to process firewood. (see Appendix U Evidence of Community Involvement)
- Farm tours for groups from the Asha Centre, who have included visits to the farm in their educational programmes. (see Appendix U Evidence of Community Involvement)

- Working at the primary school in Yorkley to revitalise their nature area, which will become an outdoor classroom for children to learn about wildlife. (see Appendix U Evidence of Community Involvement)
- Assisting staff at the Youth Café in Lydney in preparatory work to create a garden on an unused piece of land. (see Appendix U Evidence of Community Involvement)
- Natural building work at Clearwell Caves.
- Working with local residents in their gardens - from physical tasks, to advice and assistance with organic growing, to the supply of plants and seedlings grown on the farm.
- Pruning trees and clearing the ground at two local overgrown orchards, with the help of several local residents.

Various people involved in the YCCF Project have also become active members in other local groups, such as:

- FoD Seedsavers
- Dean Meadows Group
- Yorkley Gardening Group
- FoD L.E.T.S. (Local Exchange Trading System)

By collaborating with groups such as these, and networks such as the Forest of Dean Transition group, the YCCF co-operative has become a part of an ever expanding network of people in the Forest working towards sustainability, positive change and community building.

We envisage the farm becoming a gathering place, a community resource and a hub for local trade and exchange of skills.

2.7 Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a flexible model that allows people to become more directly involved with their own food and fuel production.

CSA models will be explored at Yorkley Court as the project develops, as a means of enabling access to land and healthy food. A thriving local example of a CSA project is Blakeney Hill Growers (<http://www.blakeneyhillgrowers.org.uk/>).

2.8 Education and skill-sharing

Yorkley Court Community Farm is becoming an educational hub for the local community for sharing skills around food and sustainable living. We aim to facilitate and encourage learning for all, regardless of background.

Workshops and Events

A number of workshops have been run and well attended including DIY solar panel building, rocket mass heater construction and willow basket weaving. A full list of previous workshops can be found in Appendix K.

Skill-sharing around organic food growing is a central focus of the weekly Sunday gardening sessions. These sessions take place in the communal vegetable garden, and are open to members of the local community to join, regardless of their level of experience in food growing. The sessions have so far proved popular, and have attracted local people of a diversity of ages and backgrounds. Accounts written by attendees of the Sunday gardening sessions can be found in Appendix U..

Woodland Crafts Education Space

The 15 acre woodland on site provides an excellent venue for agroecological woodland management and traditional woodland crafts with the capacity to supply the required craft materials.

We aim to enable a wider audience to reconnect with these skills in a woodland setting. The space will be used for workshops and courses, a number of instructors have already expressed an interest in using the proposed space for teaching.

Details of this and other business proposals are in Appendix B.

Dissemination

Knowledge which is developed and shared on the farm also gains a wider audience through -

- the farm's presence at local events,
- features in the local media,
- the farm's website and email lists
- participation in various themed events and networks both online and offline

We are keen to expand these activities.

Open access

A transparency of costs has allowed courses to operate on a donations basis and make a profit. This allows participation from those otherwise unable to acquire training.

Data and media that has been produced on farm has been made available under open licences.

Section 3 – Policy Considerations

Our proposal is in line with a large range of both national and local policies in terms of key policy issues such as sustainable development, renewable energy and affordable housing.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states: “At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.”

The NPPF states :

“There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental...Therefore, to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.”

3.1 Economic Sustainability

In an era of unprecedented financial turmoil it is important to remember that economics is about more than just finance, it is about the production and distribution of produce and services. While it would be imprudent not to focus seriously on the financial performance of a local economy it could be considered wise to also contemplate how an economy functions underneath this and how resilient it is to unstable markets forces and precarious international financial mechanisms.

Economic Growth

The NPPF states:

“The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system.

To help achieve economic growth, local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business and support an economy fit for the 21st

century.”

Forest of Dean (FoD) Core Strategy, section 5.18 states:

"In rural areas including the villages, the emphasis will be on sustainable rural development to be promoted where it supports the local economy and is compatible with the conservation of the countryside. "

The YCCF project is already incubating numerous enterprises, that are increasing the diversity of the local food economy and opening it up to many more residents of the Forest of Dean. There is a firm commitment to continue this trend. The focus on all aspects of sustainability ensures that the enterprises that find support at the farm meet the requirements for a robust future local economy.

Sustainable Rural Business Cluster and Incubator

The NPPF states:

“local planning authorities should

- support existing business sectors, taking account of whether they are expanding or contracting and, where possible, identify and plan for new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area. Policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances
- support existing business sectors, taking account of whether they are expanding or contracting and, where possible, identify and plan for new or emerging sectors likely to locate in their area. Policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances;
- plan positively for the location, promotion and expansion of clusters or networks of knowledge driven, creative or high technology industries;
- identify priority areas for economic regeneration, infrastructure provision and environmental enhancement; and
- facilitate flexible working practices such as the integration of residential and commercial uses within the same unit.”

FoD Core Strategy, section 5.8 states:

"New or expanding enterprises will be encouraged in villages and in suitable circumstances in the open countryside where they can make a positive contribution to their localities in terms of economic and social well being. This means that there will be a positive view taken where proposals can demonstrate that they are sustainable and would benefit their localities.....

The prime aim is to benefit the countryside and to enhance the area's economy and the impact of any development in the countryside should therefore be a positive one in terms of the sustainability.”

Since its inception 2 years ago YCCF has provided an environment suitable for the incubation of rural enterprises focused on sustainability and local production. YCCF is positively growing the local economy beyond the boundaries of the land on which it operates. Numerous enterprises

have begun to operate from the farm or have been set up by people who have found support and inspiration at the farm that has helped them during the development of their venture. (for details see Appendix B Business Plans, and Sections 2.4 - 2.6 of this document)

Farm Size, Productivity and Employment

FoD Core Strategy states:

“While some of this commuting may be through choice, it is related to the relative lack of jobs in the district, and to the types of jobs that are available. The imbalance is predicted to worsen over the next few years with the current job deficit rising from 7000 to 10 000 by 2015. Its reduction, and the reduction of out commuting, is one of the key aims of this strategy and of the Council's own Corporate Plan. It is central to attaining a more sustainable future for the area, by bringing a wider range of employment within easy access of a greater proportion of the population.”

Intensive industrialised farming practices have been widely adopted with the promise of greater efficiency, producing more food more economically, but the reality is somewhat different. Practices have developed following the logic of mass production where through increasing scale and levels of mechanisation greater production is made per unit of labour.

Economic benefits from up-scaling are however not materialising. Figures from 2007 show that small UK farms are on average 5 times more profitable, per hectare, than larger farms. They also provide almost four times as many jobs per hectare. Small farms are also more productive per hectare, something worth considering on a small island where we import 40% of our food - this leaves us extremely vulnerable to food supply disruptions

The small scale intensive agroecological production methods being used on the farm lend themselves to diversified operations which in turn create more job opportunities.

DEFRA's Future Of Farming Review Report - July 2013 states:

“The purchase of land has been one of the key, traditional routes of entry into the industry. However, we have seen a substantial increase in the price of land in recent years. Farmland prices have for example increased by 2% in the second half of 2012 to approximately £8,520 per acre, largely driven by commercial farmers acquiring and expanding their businesses. This increase, coupled with the difficulty many people face acquiring the necessary finance to buy land, has made it almost impossible for conventional new entrants to start through this route.

Another traditional route to enter farming is by taking a tenancy.... Historically, tenancies would be granted under a legislative code consolidated by the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 (AHA). This offered lifetime security to the tenant and succession rights for two generations, subject to certain conditions being met, although this has since been restricted to the lifetime of the tenant. The Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 introduced Farm Business Tenancies (FBTs) with significantly more freedom of contract. These FBTs tend to be on average between three to five years duration, which some consider too short a period to properly establish a business”

and;

“If we are to deliver a competitive and sustainable farming sector, we concluded that we need the right people, including farming entrepreneurs, managers and workers, to rise to that challenge. That will not only mean continuous training and development for those already in the industry, but also a ready supply of entrepreneurial new entrants and workers for old and new businesses alike. We cannot be complacent. We must create an attractive career path, an environment in which exciting and stretching opportunities are available and where there is a clear prospect of proper reward. In addition, simply promoting entry is not enough”

The granting of temporary planning permission for low impact structures in the open countryside is one method that can be used to remove the great barriers for agricultural new entrants and enable them to make a start building their farming skills and enterprise. Where these enterprises prove to be sustainable and beneficial to the local community permission can be extended to encourage their further development. There is no doubt that many of the people engaged in land based enterprises at YCCF would not have been able to find routes into the sector at this time, were it not for the opportunity afforded to them by the somewhat unique situation at YCCF.

For more information see:

- Appendix W Large Farms in Europe
- Appendix V Hungry for Land
- Appendix Y Small is Successful

Commodity Markets Volatility

Food commodity market volatility in 2008 and 2010 led to political unrest, including protests and food riots as people reacted to rocketing food prices. In response to this a number of countries introduced export bans or restrictions in efforts to stabilise domestic prices. This affected international availability and pushed the price of commodities higher.

Some market analysts pointed to the never-before-seen influx of huge volumes of capital into the food commodity financial derivative markets as being an influencing factor. These markets in futures, swaps and other derivatives had previously been used solely by agricultural commodity producers, handlers, insurers and traders to hedge against factors such as weather causing unpredictability of production and supply in agricultural commodities. Faced with the 2007 collapse of the gigantic credit derivatives markets in property mortgages and other traditional markets financial traders invested massively in the food commodity derivatives markets increasing market volatility throughout the sector.

FoD Core Strategy, section 4.8 states:

“A broader base and a closer relationship to the natural assets of the area (for example using the setting of sites as part of their attraction for new forms of business) will be promoted through the Core Strategy. Diversification to match the needs and aspirations of residents will also be important, and will be promoted through the availability of land in suitable locations... The support of local businesses will be an important feature of the strategy, as will the growth of existing and new enterprises.”

Agroecological management provides increased yields and greater diversity of crops. A higher level of economic resilience and sustainability is created compared to the average UK farm where unfavourable conditions for the sole produce of monocrop fields can quickly eat away at profits. Agroecological practices provide farm diversification without a change of focus from essential food production to non-food crops or out of agriculture completely.

Farm Inputs

With industrial agricultural production a significant proportion of economic gain leaves the local economy via the purchase of crucial inputs (fertilisers, fungicide, pesticide, herbicide, diesel fuel, machinery) and produce is sold, often out of the area, straight to the commodity markets. It is common for farmers to make little, if any, profits from their farming relying on Common Agricultural Policy Single Payment Scheme payments to make their enterprises economically viable.

A significant proportion of agricultural inputs are derived from commodities for which the prices have all seen significant price increases in recent years:

- fertiliser, largely produced from natural gas (nitrogen) and mined minerals (phosphorus and potassium)
- pesticides and herbicides which are synthesised from petroleum
- diesel fuel

Due to geopolitical instability in key regions of gas and oil production and distribution, the combined factors of dwindling, and ever more expensive to extract supplies and a booming demand, global energy supplies are becoming increasingly less secure.

The agroecological systems we are developing are designed to be sustainable, reducing or ultimately negating inputs by creating ecosystems where plants and animals are parts of a complex symbiotic web of relationships.

3.2 Environmental Sustainability

NPPF paragraph 17 'Core Planning Principles':

“...support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy)...

...contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution.

...promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land

can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production).”

FoD Core Strategy Section 5.8 states:

“The strategy is intended to help retain an active economy in such a way as to safeguard the character and diversity of the countryside. It must also safeguard and wherever possible enable enhancement of the area as this has a direct impact on the attractiveness to further enterprises, as well as protecting the environment enjoyed by residents”

FOD Core Strategy, 'Providing quality environments':

“Providing quality environments throughout the district to protect the environment for the benefit of the community and in order to attract new businesses: The Core Strategy will protect the environment by guiding the location of development and by requiring high standards of design. It will require development that is more energy efficient and provides a proportion of its energy through renewable means.”

Farm Inputs

It is widely recognised that the various inputs used in industrial agriculture have numerous negative environmental impacts both at the point of their use and during their production and distribution. Reducing or negating the requirements for inputs increases the environmental sustainability of a farm.

Soil Health

Industrialised agriculture is destroying the world's viable topsoil at an alarming rate. Professor John Crawford in a report to the World Economic Forum, December 2012 states that “current rates of soil degradation suggests we have about 60 years of topsoil left.” His report goes on to clarify:

“Soil is a living material: if you hold a handful of soil, there will be more micro-organisms in there than the number of people who have ever lived on the planet. These microbes recycle organic material, which underpins the cycle of life on Earth, and also engineer the soil on a tiny level to make it more resilient and better at holding onto water. Microbes need carbon for food, but carbon is being lost from the soil in a number of ways... carbon is lost by too much disturbance of the soil by over-ploughing and by the misuse of certain fertilizers.”

The Environment Agency estimates 2.2 million tonnes of topsoil are lost to erosion in the UK each year. Recent soil data research completed under the PESERA program suggests that some areas of the Forest of Dean under industrial arable production could be seeing topsoil loss greater than 2 tonnes of topsoil per hectare a year.

DEFRA's policy document *Safeguarding our Soils* PB13297 states:

“Successfully addressing degradation in agricultural soils is essential to achieving our vision. Farmers, foresters and other land managers are responsible for the management of the majority of our soils. We must work with them to promote good practice and incentivise improved soil management.”

Soil erosion will be addressed through the use of low tillage techniques, ground cover mulches, green manures, ally cropping, and extensive tree and shrub planting which protects against both wind and rain based soil erosion.

The agroecological land management methods employed at the farm promote higher levels of glomalin in the soil. Glomalin was only identified in 1996 but along with related proteins it makes up 30% of carbon in soil and acts as a glue to hold the rest of the soil together in a good structure, decreasing erosion and aiding water retention. Glomalin is found in association with arbuscular mycorrhizal (AM) fungi which form symbiotic relationships with the roots of a plants providing water and nutrients to the plant gathering them from the soil or from other plants that don't need them. Industrial arable farming does not provide suitable habitat for AM fungi, AM fungi do not survive in areas sprayed with herbicides, heavily fertilized or where there is not constant plant root presence. The use of mixed planting, perennials, trees and shrubs throughout the farm, along with low tillage cultivation and applications of organic matter and biochar (see Appendix N), which will be produced in cooking/heating stoves on the farm, acts to create a healthy soil ecosystem and a suitable environment for AM fungi to thrive. Significant amounts of carbon are sequestered into the soil as the soil is built up with animal manures, biochar, crop residues and green manures.

Diverse Ecosystems

The far greater ecological diversity on a small agroecological mixed farm provides widely recognised environmental benefits. Many of the environmentally beneficial practices encouraged or legislated for in the farming sector are naturally adopted under agroecological management as the whole ecosystem the farm exists within is carefully considered and highly valued.

Renewable Energy

The renewable energy systems in use, and planned, at the farm provide a greatly reduce environmental impact. It is also important to note that these systems are small scale and the technology to maintain them is easily accessed through basic training.

3.3 Social Sustainability

The NPPF states:

“Planning policies and decisions, in turn, should aim to achieve places which promote: opportunities for meetings between members of the community who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, including through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres”

“To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community

needs, planning policies and decisions should:

- plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;
- guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;"

FoD Core Strategy 5.8 States:

"New or expanding enterprises will be encouraged in villages and in suitable circumstances in the open countryside where they can make a positive contribution to their localities in terms of economic and social well being. This means that there will be a positive view taken where proposals can demonstrate that they are sustainable and would benefit their localities"

FoD Core Strategy

"Creating thriving and sustainable communities is all about making the present communities more attractive for living and working in and encouraging a range of activities that make the best use of the area's natural attributes. It is about providing for new growth in a way that contributes to a stable long term future for the area, while retaining its distinct qualities and reducing the carbon footprint."

Central to the ethos of the YCCF is the building and strengthening of links within the local community, to encourage wider involvement in the project and to play a part in enhancing community resilience and sustainability in the Forest of Dean.

In a short time the local community has recognised the social value of YCCF. A growing number of people are engaging with projects based or incubated at YCCF opening them to an increased range of social interactions and enabling them to provision themselves with food and firewood.

Promoting food sovereignty necessitates giving people more power over their food supply. Through the sharing of skills, advice, labour, seeds, plants, tools and its open governance structure YCCF provides an empowering experience allowing them to gain a higher level of self-determination.

The NPPF states:

"The UK Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future* set out five 'guiding principles' of sustainable development: living within the planet's environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using sound science responsibly"

YCCF acquires high levels of social sustainability through involving the the local community in the governance of projects. There is an explicit intention to safeguard the farm and have an open path into collaborating in the management and stewardship of the farm. Participation in the individual projects on the farm is encouraged so that the local community can be actively engaged in moulding the farm and its enterprises in ways that sustains the community. Through widespread participation YCCF and the individual projects become highly responsive and adaptive to local needs.

Details of community involvement can be found in:

Appendix U: Evidence of community involvement

Appendix K: Previous events and workshops

Appendix G: Letters of support

3.4 Low Impact Development

The government's *Carbon Plan* to meet carbon emission targets describes the need for “a dramatic shift away from fossil fuels and towards low carbon alternatives” with a plan to “deliver zero carbon new homes from 2016”, which seems difficult to envision given current trends.

As opposed to traditional developments our structures will be built purely by hand from predominantly recycled or sustainably sourced materials for a near-zero carbon construction.

On the subject of sustainable development, the NPPF states:

“There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental...Therefore, to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.”

A comprehensive study by the University of the West of England on Low Impact Development projects stated:

“From the evidence collected by this study it is clear that LID makes strong contributions to the environmental aspects of sustainability. Its contribution to the social aspects is also significant. LID’s contribution to the economic aspects of sustainability is more modest but also positive.

What is most striking is that LID makes positive contributions to all three aspects of sustainability *together*, without trading off against each other. In this respect LID appears to be an intrinsically sustainable form of development.”

See Appendix H *Low Impact Dwellings* for more details.

3.5 Farm diversification

NPPF section 3, 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' states:

“Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

- support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings;
- promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres;”

3.6 Local Policies

Sustainability

FOD Core Strategy, section 4.3 'To be a thriving and sustainable community':

“Creating thriving and sustainable communities is all about making the present communities more attractive for living and working in and encouraging a range of activities that make the best use of the area's natural attributes. It is about providing for new growth in a way that contributes to a stable long term future for the area, while retaining its distinct qualities and reducing the carbon footprint. ...The services, employment and other facilities on offer over the range of settlements is critical to the maintenance of thriving communities and the further development of them will be supported by this Core Strategy. Settlements not so closely linked to the forest core are just as important to their surroundings and the Core Strategy provides the context for their continued contribution to a more sustainable future.”

FOD Core Strategy, section 4.6:

“Increased energy efficiency and the use of increased recycling are promoted within the LDF and at a national and county level.”

FOD Core Strategy, section 6.20:

“Completed major developments and those which involve the construction of new dwellings must include provision for the use of renewable sources of energy sufficient to reduce their carbon emissions”.

Education

FOD Core Strategy, section 4.10:

“The continued development of educational opportunities is as important as the provision of an attractive physical environment in making the area attractive to employers and in retaining employees.”

3.7 Landscape considerations

Visual Impact

The proposed structures will be sited in the woodland, out of view from roads or public places so as not to create a negative visual impact on the countryside.

Impact of development in the countryside

A key planning issue in rural areas is protecting the countryside from urban sprawl to preserve the landscape and natural assets.

Traditional developments have large and lasting impact on the land, whereas Low Impact Development is development which through its low negative environmental impact either enhances or does not significantly diminish environmental quality.

Low-impact structures like the ones proposed do not constitute operational development as they have no foundations.

The proposal also includes the change of a Nissen hut to a kitchen space, which similarly does not require any new operational development.

See Low Impact Dwellings, Appendix H for more details.

Land Management

Our ethos and land management plan is based on the principles of agroecology as such it includes design features that allow for wild spaces, conserve woodland and increase hedgerow areas. All design elements take into consideration the need to have adaptive and resilient systems that support the social and economic need of the inhabitants as well as the surrounding ecology.

FOD Core Strategy section 6.13:

“All development will be required to adapt to climate change and in doing so will need to show that the appropriate considerations have been taken into account... Positive land management (either as part of the planning system or outside it) such as native tree planting can for example address flood risk and heating and cooling while providing other environmental benefits.”

See *Land Management Plan* (Appendix C) for full details.

3.8 Transport issues

Transport is a large part of sustainability and responsible resource use. We will utilise and promote alternative transport such as bicycles and buses wherever possible and have a functioning lift-share scheme in place. For a full Transport Summary see Appendix F.

Section 4 – Evidence of Essential Need

National planning policies until recently provided detailed guidelines for agricultural or forestry workers' dwellings, and dwellings supporting “rural-based enterprises” which included criteria regarding “functional need”, “financial viability” and “evidence of intention and ability” set out in PPS 7 Annex A.

The documents containing these guidelines have since been superseded by the NPPF paragraph 55:

“Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as: the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside...”

A number of recent applications for dwellings on agricultural land have cited the use of the previous framework as a useful guideline for demonstrating an essential need, such as the Inspector's judgment for the Ecological Land Co-operative's application:

“The evidence given on behalf of the Council proceeded on the basis that the tests formerly set out in PPS 7 would be helpful in gauging whether an 'essential need' for the proposed temporary dwellings exists, and cited in support of that approach the findings of an Inspector in a recent appeal decision (Ref APP/C1625/C/12/2171928 & 2172069). I

share that Inspector's view that in some circumstances the methodology set out in Annex A can still be a material consideration, albeit on the basis that it is no longer government policy, but it is crucial to note (as he did) that the terms of paragraph 55 of the NPPF do not preclude the demonstration of 'essential need' by evidence that does not seek to, or cannot, show that all of the Annex A tests have been met."

The guidance from the PPS7 tests is addressed in the following sections.

Forest of Dean Core Strategy CSP 4 supports appropriate developments in the open countryside :

"There will be cases where development is not located at settlements because of its nature but these will need to be justified (for example agricultural development and some tourism development is appropriate away from settlements)."

4.1 Financial viability

An overview and assessment of our proposed enterprises is in Appendix B. The primary function is to provide the food and fuel needs for our community on a subsistence basis whilst providing a modest income to supplement this. The enterprises are also geared towards providing additional benefits such as education.

PPS 7 Annex A, paragraph 8 states: "Some enterprises which aim to operate broadly on a subsistence basis, but which nonetheless provide wider benefits (eg in managing attractive landscapes or wildlife habitats) can be sustained on relatively low financial returns."

In an application at *Par* in Cornwall (T/APP/Q0830/A/93/226397/P6 17th March 1994) for a dwelling on a smallholding using horses, the inspector stated:

"Thus the use of working horses and the lower level of mechanisation here means a much higher labour requirement than on the modern mechanised farm. Similarly, the use of natural fertilisers from manure and composting will eliminate the costs of artificial products, as will to some extent, the use of non-commercial poultry feed. I also consider that the income and the other benefits from over-wintering of horses [not normally considered an agricultural operation] should be taken into account in this case because they are a small but integral part of the overall business plan, and because of Government encouragement for diversification... The application of the standard assessment tests to this type of enterprise is not so helpful as it is when dealing with a conventional farm."

Agricultural Appraisal

An agricultural appraisal of our business plans has also been carried out by a qualified specialist,

which concluded that the business plans and the project as a whole are economically viable (see appendix D).

4.2 Functional need

As a co-operative that collaborates to manage and operates multiple projects, we have many daily activities which include:

- Animal care
- Plant care
- Coppicing
- Land management
- Processing of milk and other produce
- Permaculture
- Biodynamic preparations
- Subsistence – providing for our material needs from the land
- Organising WWOOFers and volunteers

The demands of a number of different activities at different times of day and night under different seasonal and weather conditions make it impractical to live away from the site.

The subsistence benefits on which the viability of the project depend cannot be obtained if everyone were to live off-site. Commuting to and from the farm would also represent a substantial increase in local traffic, not to mention fossil fuel use.

A number of planning precedents have concluded that permaculture-style land management requires residence on the land being used, such as the Landmatters Permaculture Project (APP/K1128/A/06/2018778, 10th June 2010) where the Inspector stated:

“Inherent in the concept of permaculture is the implementation of wide-ranging and inter-related sustainable initiatives on a single agricultural site in a communal way. I am thus persuaded that various activities set out in the Appellants’ land management and enterprise plans should be considered cumulatively rather than individually, so that a holistic view of the overall project can be taken.

I am also satisfied that the evidence before me demonstrates clearly that, in order to practice permaculture properly and successfully on the scale envisaged in this case, a substantial and continuous residential presence is essential.”

4.3 Evidence of intention and Ability

We have been here for nearly 2 years engaging in the project already, in which time we have put on a number of workshops and events. From the beginning we have had regular meetings with and input from local people.

Investments

We have made a number of investments in the project and infrastructure for the farm, including:

- a polytunnel
- livestock
- tools and machinery
- solar panels
- water pumps and filtration system
- soil and water tests
- fencing for rabbit-proofing and animal enclosures

Skills and Qualifications

Members of the co-operative are qualified in various fields, including:

- natural building
- organic gardening
- biodynamic agriculture
- permaculture
- tree surgery & woodland management
- teaching
- engineering

and have experience in:

- commercial organic food production
- community projects
- accountancy
- project development
- events organising

Numerous members of the project have both worked and studied at various places around the Forest including Oaklands Park, Taurus Crafts, The Grange Village and the Asha Centre.

4.4 Other material considerations

Siting of new dwellings

Planning policies state that new dwellings should preferably be sited on land which has previously been developed. The lower section of the site on which the proposed developments will be sited was used previously as an open cast mine and as such could be considered brownfield.

Temporary dwellings

The PPS7 framework for agricultural dwellings stated that for permanent permission the agricultural enterprise needed to be established and show previous financial viability over the previous 3 years, whereas temporary permission could be granted for proposed or new agricultural enterprises, with dwellings provided for by: "a caravan, a wooden structure which can be easily dismantled, or other temporary structure."

In the *Plants for a Future* planning application (T/APP/W1145/A/99/1034645/P2 1st June 2000) where temporary permission was granted for dwellings supporting an organic smallholding, the inspector stated:

"If the scheme fails, the site would revert to woodland, improving the local landscape, or be developed in line with extant holiday and recreational planning permissions. If on the other hand, the project is successful those elements granted temporary planning permission would need to be reviewed when they lapse. If no longer appropriate, new permissions would not be issued for such development. Any affected uses would have to cease and any structures associated with them removed and the land returned to its former condition. It follows that there would be no abuse of the planning system."

The above judgement also applies to our proposal, as the dwellings could be removed without any lasting impact on the land.

We have been residing and working on the farm already for nearly 2 years, in which time our presence has been reasonably unobtrusive in terms of the landscape and positive in terms of our presence in the community.

We ask to be allowed to continue with the work we have been doing and to have a chance to develop our enterprises to fruition.

For examples of similar applications see *Relevant Planning Precedents* (Appendix A).